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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/20/2027
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AJ](#) [MARR](#) [PHUM](#)
SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN STRONGLY PROTESTS CHANGED USG
NAGORNO-KARABAKH WORDING, POSTPONES SECURITY TALKS

Classified By: Ambssador Anne E. Derse, Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

1. (C) SUMMARY: The GOAJ on April 20 reacted harshly to the USG's recently published revisions to the language in the 2006 Human Rights report on Armenia, pointing to new wording that "Armenian forces occupy large portions of Azerbaijani territory adjacent to Nagorno-Karabakh," as a weakening of, if not a fundamental change in, the USG's longstanding position that Nagorno-Karabakh is Azerbaijani territory. The Foreign Minister called the Ambassador on April 20 to protest the change as "absolutely unacceptable, unhelpful to the peace talks and raising questions about the USG as an honest broker." The President was similarly bitter in an April 21 conversation with the Ambassador, saying he could not understand why there had been a change in wording if there is no change in policy, and pointing to the damage that will be done to the negotiations from stories already emerging in the Armenian and Russian media about the State Department's "mistake" on this highly sensitive point. Aliyev said that FonMin Mammadyarov would work with the USG to resolve the problem, but said it would be "inappropriate" to send the large GOAJ delegation for the April 23 security talks until a resolution had been found. Mammadayrov told the Ambassador that "we are waiting for the US to formulate clearly and publicly that NK is part of Azerbaijan...we need a very clear statement from the press secretary...that NK is part of Azerbaijan." Mammadyarov and DAS Brzya agreed on April 21 that given stories emerging in the press that mischaracterize US policy, the USG will issue a clarification on Monday. We urge Washington not to underestimate the real and serious impact this incident has had on the GOAJ's top leadership and potentially the public (septel). A business-as-usual response will not suffice: we need to move quickly and decisively to publicly counter perceptions that the US position has in any way weakened or tilted, to contain the damage and keep relations on track. END SUMMARY

FonMin's Message

2. (C) Late on April 20, Foreign Minister Mammadyarov called the Ambassador to protest "in the strongest terms" the change in the text of the 2006 Human Rights Report on Armenia referring to Armenia's occupation of NK (see para 17). The Minister said the revised language stating that "Armenian forces occupy large portions of Azerbaijan's territory adjacent to NK" is inconsistent with the USG's longstanding position recognizing the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and is "absolutely unacceptable...NK is a part of Azerbaijan," the Minister underscored. The change is "unhelpful to the peace talks and the negotiations and raises questions about the position of the US as an honest broker," he said.

3. (C) Mammadyarov asked the Ambassador sharply "how the US could talk about NK as if it were not a part of Azerbaijan," given the acute sensitivity of the issue here. The Minister said he expected the issue to be all over the press the next day. "This weak language raises questions. It is reflecting on the Armenian position in the NK talks. I am trying to get the Armenians to make changes (in the NK talks); the change to already agreed language in the Human Rights Report will create a lot of trouble. It is very, very unhelpful."

4. (C) Mammadyarov said that the GOAJ is taking the issue "very, very seriously," and asked that on Monday the USG "at least" issue a clarification as to why this change was made and what it means -- "to at least increase the understanding of the people" in Azerbaijan. He noted that Ambassador Aliyev

had been told in Washington that no changes would be made to the Human Rights reports once they had been published. He said MFA will instruct the Azerbaijani Ambassador in Washington to make a formal demarche and Deputy Foreign Minister Araz Azimov will raise the issue while in Washington for the April 23 Security Dialogue. (COMMENT: President Aliyev subsequently instructed the delegation not to attend the talks. END COMMENT)

15. (C) Mammadyarov told the Ambassador that President Aliyev is "furious, extremely upset, asking 'how can I trust them when they put a knife in my back?'" Mammadyarov said the President told him, "I'm taking the challenges, going ahead, making the choices, but because of the subjective pressure of the Armenian lobby this language was changed. I want to be

sure of the official USG position." This point is extremely important to the President, Mammadyarov stated: "that there is not a change in position...we need a very serious strong statement that NK is part of Azerbaijan." In response, the Ambassador re-affirmed the USG's policy of strong support for the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and said she would seek immediate clarification on the change in the Human Rights Report from Washington.

16. (C) In a subsequent telephone conversation that night, Deputy Foreign Minister Araz Azimov told the Ambassador the President had instructed the members of the security dialogue delegation not to go to Washington until this issue was resolved. Aliyev asked Azimov to go alone for talks, "because it would be ugly" to cancel them entirely, and to address the NK issue as the first order of business. If that can be satisfactorily resolved, Azimov said, the President had authorized him to continue discussion on the other issues.

17. (C) Azimov said that a particularly troubling aspect of this incident is that "the President relies greatly on the strength of the USG position" on NK to counter views from "both the North and the South" alleging that the USG pursues a "double standard" with respect to the conflict.

Aliyev's Comments

18. (C) On April 21, the Ambassador spoke to President Aliyev to follow up on Foreign Minister Mammadyarov's message of the previous day and subsequent exchanges with both him and USG Minsk group co-chair DAS Bryza. The Ambassador stressed to the President that the USG understood clearly the seriousness of the GOAJ's concern about the change in wording in the 2006 Human Rights Report on Armenia. She underscored that the USG had no intention of signaling any change in policy concerning NK, there was no implication of any change in the new wording and our longstanding policy remained the same. She told Aliyev what DAS Bryza had stressed in his conversations with the FonMin -- the USG is committed to acting as an honest broker in the Minsk Group process, and to working with the GOAJ to constructively manage and resolve the current situation.

19. (C) President Aliyev told the Ambassador that it is one thing to hear a re-affirmation of US policy privately, and another to hear it publicly, as "an official position reflected in official wording." He said the GOAJ has "one simple question: 'if there is no change in the USG position, why this new wording?'" He said to him the new wording indicated the activity of the Armenian lobby or the fact that the USG position has in fact changed: "This is a very serious signal. We are in very serious negotiations in the context of the Minsk Group. If a change like this can happen so quickly we must think about the value of agreements signed (in the Minsk context) and how they may change. I do not understand how this could happen -- the initial wording should be restored. If nothing has changed in USG policy, why did the wording change?" He said the USG and the GOAJ need to discuss openly why this happened, so the GOAJ could "understand."

110. (C) Aliyev said not only the Armenian press but Russian websites have started to carry reports that "the State Department acknowledged its mistake," on this highly sensitive point and changed the 2006 Human Rights report for Armenia. The Armenian National Committee of America's (ANCA) statement that the State Department had "reconsidered the mistake" was also being reported in press. Aliyev said that FM Mammadyarov is "of course ready to work with you" to manage the problem, but he added that "we did nothing to create it, we didn't change" positions or policy.

111. (C) The Ambassador told Aliyev that the USG understands press statements drawing on the change in wording to mischaracterize the USG position or imply a change in USG policy on this sensitive issue was a problem, which the USG wants to help resolve. We hoped that the GOAJ would work with us to do so. She said the USG had also begun to see reports from the Armenian press about the change in wording that misstated US policy. She stressed that the USG is prepared to publicly correct misstatements about USG policy

on NK, noting that the State Department's spokesman had issued a statement on April 20, as soon as the Embassy had

relayed GOAJ concerns. She said DAS Bryza has talked with the FM about the possibility of strengthening the USG's clarification in response to the emerging mischaracterizations of USG policy in the press; there was the possibility of further clarifying Friday's statement, which Washington will address at the first possible opportunity, on Monday. The Ambassador told Aliyev that DAS Bryza would discuss with him ways to work together to resolve this problem if the President wished.

¶12. (C) Concerning bilateral security talks scheduled to take place on April 23 in Washington, the Ambassador said the USG sees these talks as an important element in strengthening its bilateral cooperation and USG commitment to Azerbaijan's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, and hoped they would go on as scheduled.

¶13. (C) Aliyev said that as a next step USG Minsk group co-chair Bryza should talk to FM Mammadyarov, and "we need to see what will happen -- we are waiting to see what will happen -- if there is joint understanding that there should be a public clarification and correction." He said Mammadyarov will inform him "when or if an appropriate way out" is found. With respect to the talks, Aliyev said it "would not be proper to send a big delegation to Washington" at this time: "NK is a big part of our security partnership. If we see a changing position, publicly, we have our ideas about our future broad cooperation on security." Aliyev said he would be prepared to send Deputy Foreign Minister Araz Azimov alone to have him discuss security issues and clarify what is happening on NK.

¶14. (C) In closing, the Ambassador reiterated to President Aliyev that the USG had no intention of signaling a change in its position, there had been no change in policy and that the USG recognizes NK as nothing other than Azerbaijani territory. She said the USG hopes the GOAJ would work constructively with us to help resolve the issue, and that the USG will work to publicly further clarify USG policy in light of misstatements in the press that mischaracterize it. She said she would put DAS Bryza in immediate touch with FM Mammadyarov to discuss ways to further clarify the USG position.

Next Steps

¶15. (C) In a subsequent April 21 conversation, FM Mammadyarov told the Ambassador that "the changing of the language in an already published document changed very dramatically the attitude of the country and the leadership with respect to the sincerity of the US." He said based on his conversation with Minsk group co-chair DAS Bryza earlier in the day, he was prepared to discuss how to resolve the issue. "We are waiting for the US to formulate clearly and publicly that NK is part of Azerbaijan, period. We need a very clear statement from the (State Department) Press Secretary that NK is part of Azerbaijan." He said he had instructed Deputy FonMin Azimov not to plan to travel to the US at this time based on his understanding that the security talks would not take place in the absence of the delegation. He said he would make a decision on the talks once the current issue is resolved. FonMin Mammadyarov and DAS Brzya spoke on April 21 and agreed that in light of stories emerging in the press with respect to revision of the HRR that mischaracterize US policy with respect to NK, the USG would issue a clarification on Monday.

¶16. (C) COMMENT: The Azerbaijani President and Foreign Minister are deeply incensed by what they view as a highly unusual change in a published USG document apparently, as they understand it, solely in order to address Armenian political concerns. The fact that the change was made without explanation or forewarning added to their shock. While we recognize that both sides in this difficult negotiation are quick to press for advantage at any opportunity, we strongly urge Washington not to underestimate the real effect this incident has had on the GOAJ leadership's confidence in the United States. We are still gauging the emerging public reaction, but note that at a minimum, given the extreme public sensitivity of NK, its centrality to an eventual resolution and the need for public support, we need to move quickly and decisively to counter public perceptions that the US position has in any way

weakened or tilted. There are many in Azerbaijan, as well as Armenia and elsewhere, who for their own reasons will seize this opportunity to fuel those misperceptions. The strength of the statement we make on Monday will be key in this regard. A business-as-usual restatement of our long-standing points will not counter strong suspicions in the GOAJ leadership that we have tilted toward Armenia, nor convince a public that is increasingly skeptical of Minsk group efforts, including those of the US. DAS Bryza's quick attention to the problem, as the USG's lead NK negotiator,

has helped to contain the damage. Nonetheless, at least as far as Azerbaijan is concerned, we have a lot to do clear the air so that we can move forward. The April 23 bilateral security talks are the first casualty; we hope they will be the last.

[17](#). (U) BACKGROUND: The following is the original and revised wording of the relevant section of the State Department 2006 Human Rights Report, Armenia Section:

- Original Wording for 2006 report, paragraph 4:

Armenia continues to occupy the Azerbaijani territory of Nagorno-Karabakh and seven surrounding Azerbaijani territories...

- Revised Wording:

Armenian forces occupy large portions of Azerbaijan territory adjacent to Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenian officials maintain they do not "occupy" Nagorno-Karabakh itself.
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